Interview with Jay Kough (1921-2007), World War II hospital corpsman present at the attack on Pearl Harbor, 7 Dec 1941; crewmen aboard USS *Enterprise* (CV-6) at Battle of Midway; witness to takeoff of Doolittle Raiders; witness to takeoff of the *Enola Gay* on its way to Hiroshima to deliver the atomic bomb ("Little Boy"). Conducted by Jan K. Herman, Historian, Bureau of Medicine and Surgery, 25 June 2001.

Let's talk about your Navy career.

I enlisted in the Navy on 15 April 1940. I went to the boot camp in Great Lakes and came out three months later; I went to the Hospital Corps School in San Diego because I had my choice of trade school because I was an honorman and got good grades. After Corps school I was assigned to the US Naval Hospital in San Diego. From there I got my orders for the USS *California* (BB-44) on 16 November 1941. On the way to way Pearl Harbor we had maneuvers and it is a good thing we did because on the 7th of December you know what happened.

What do you remember about that?

It was really a bloody undertaking. We were completely unprepared. We weren't warned of anything and we weren't looking for anything, even though, some of us had a gut feeling there was something in the air because the Japanese were being a bit too secretive about everything that was going on. When they came in on December 7, I was taking a shower on the battleship. My duty station was in the sick bay and I had to evacuate wounded out of there when the attack started.

This was on the *California*?

This was on the *California*, yes. My job was to get the wounded out of the sick bay and onto the top tier. My battle station was on the second deck. I got them out of the sick bay, and about an hour later after the attack waves were through we abandoned ship. We were only a little ways off of Ford Island, about 50 yards, and I was able to swim to shore and the other guys somehow made it too. I had one guy in tow with me but the other guys just treaded water and made it.

We got on the beach, administered first aid, applied bandages, gave morphine shots, just anything to ease the pain. In all that time I did not see one case of cowardice. These guys had a job to do and we were all too busy doing something and didn't have the chance to think about what was going on.

When the smoke lifted we went back to the *California* and tried to salvage what we could. They left a skeleton crew and I was transferred at the receiving station on 14 January 1942.

Where was the receiving station?

It was right on Oahu in Pearl Harbor. I went to the *Enterprise* on the 14 January 1942 and from there participated in 11 battles. My battle stars comprised Pearl Harbor, Marshall-Gilbert raids of February 1942; Air action off Bougainville, 24 February 1942; Marquis Island raid of 4 March 1942; The Battle of Midway, and in between, in April, we had Jimmy Doolittle's raid and battles at Guadalcanal. They had loaded their planes on the *Hornet* and we were along for air coverage and defense for him. We didn't know anything about it until we got out at sea and they told us where we were going.

Just about the time we got out there we were spotted by a fishing boat. Of course, we knew they would radio our position back to Tokyo so we sank the boat and turned around. Luckily for us there was a big storm squall that blew in and the clouds were just thicker than the dickens. They couldn't see down to us and we couldn't see up to them but they were over us all afternoon until we got out of range.

Who was over you?

The Japanese planes that took off from Tokyo. They came out looking for us because they figured we would have some ships out there some place because we flew the B-25's in. What the Japanese couldn't figure out is where are these planes were coming from and they didn't know until after the war how that raid was pulled off. They didn't even think how they were going to get the planes back on the carrier. They were just dumbfounded because our planes, after they bombed Tokyo, flew into China and other locations. This was a mystery to the Japanese and they never did solve it. We worked them over pretty good and after that we came out and got into the battle of Midway and that was a beauty.

You were in corps school, then on board the *California*, and then you went to the receiving station and then you were assigned to the *Enterprise*.

I want to interject that the *Enterprise* was the most decorated ship in the fleet. It was the only carrier to get both the Presidential Unit Citation and the Unit Citation. Other carriers got one or the other but they never got both.

When did you report to the *Enterprise*?

I reported to the *Enterprise* on 14 January 1942.

What was your impression of the ship?

I had never seen anything so big in my life. When I went aboard the *California* I went aboard at night and then coming back we ran into squalls and we didn't spend so much time aboard because the weather was so bad. Once we got into Honolulu I finally got a pretty good look at it. When the *Enterprise* came in, it was in the day time. When I went aboard her I didn't think I was ever going to go down to the sick bay. It was huge. It took your breath away. I met a fellow I went through corps school with and he said "I'll tell you one thing we are going some place and believe me it is going to be big." We knew the carriers were going carry the brunt of the battle in this war because Japan had a bunch of them. The *Saratoga* was sunk, the *Lexington* was sunk the *Yorktown* was sunk, the *Hornet* was sunk. At one time, for a span of 5 months, the *Enterprise* was the only carrier operating in the South Pacific. We stayed out for an 8-month period just out of reach of the bombers and just kept going back and forth. And they would say we spotted a carrier down here, and another one over here. And they didn't know how many carriers we really had.

Did you get down to the Coral Sea?

No, that was the only battle the *Enterprise* missed and that was before I went aboard. She was on the way to the Coral Sea when it was all over. Out of 21 engagements she made 20 of them.

After the Coral Sea I remember the Yorktown was very badly damaged and it came back to Pearl.

The Yorktown was very badly damaged at the Coral Sea.

It came back to Pearl and they realized they had to get it ready for action very quickly. You were in Pearl when that happened. You were on the *Enterprise* at that time.

I was on the *Enterprise*.

So you guys were just circling around out there.

Right. We were just out there letting the Japs pick us up but we didn't get too close for them to have a gang attack on us. We just wanted them to find us and make them think that we had four or five carriers. Even they didn't know how many carriers they had sunk.

What do your recall about preparations for Midway? Were there any special preparations that you went through?

Did you ever see the movie "Tora! Tora! Tora!?"

Oh yes, sure I did.

Do you remember the fellow down there who broke the code?

CDR Rochefort.

He said let us send a fake message and tell them that "AR" is short of water.

Right, that was Midway.

That was the code's name for Midway and sure enough the Japanese picked it up, alerted their fleet and then we knew where they were going. That's exactly what they did. That was a real fierce battle. We lost the *Yorktown* and also the *Wasp* and we got hit pretty badly too.

What do you recall from that day, June 4th?

All I know is that it went from the 3rd to the 6th, a 4- day battle and it was just a constant battle.

Where were you when all this was happening?

My battle station was on the flight deck on the aft end with the 40mm and 5-inch gun mounts. I had about 24 people to take care of because that's how many people they had at those guns. If anything happened that was my station. Unfortunately, I was up forward taking care of some people who were hit by shrapnel. We had taken a direct hit on a 5-inch gun mount which killed about 18 people.

That was the gun mount you were responsible for?

That was the gun mount I was responsible for, and they had completely wiped it out. That bomb hit right smack in the middle of it. I was up forward up around a little turret and the shrapnel was bouncing off of there like popcorn. It was really shaky.

What were you able to do with the equipment you had?

I took care of the guys that were hit by shrapnel; I bandaged them up and gave them morphine shots. I gave them first aid and got them to lay down and covered them up with blankets, and told them to stay where they were until we there was a lull and we could get them back to the sick bay where they could be more comfortable. They all went along with it. It was just more or less a first aid thing--taking care of the people, making them comfortable, and pacifying them the best we could.

Could you see the battle going on around you?

Oh yes. My battle station was on the flight deck and the flight deck is where the planes come on and off. Standing up there, you could see all the planes coming in and the battle going on, the Japs dropping and the shells going up and our planes going off. It was just like a circus. We got to look at the whole thing. Luckily for us we had some good fighter planes and they didn't get through to us. When the pilots on the *Enterprise* went into battle they opened their radios so that we could hear everything that was going on. They would say "I got that SOB," "Here's one on your tail" just like you see in the movies.

You were able to follow the whole thing?

Oh yes. We got a good running account of the battle and these pilots really poured it on them alright. They fixed them good.

You sunk three carriers.

That was something else I was going to point out. The four carriers, the *Kaga*, *Akagi*, *Hiryu* and *Soryu* were four of their main carriers. They were the four that spearheaded the attack on Pearl Harbor and we got every one of them.

It was payback time.

Yes.

What do you remember about the aftermath?

We knew that once they lost those carriers their offensive was over. We set up a screen for defensive purposes just in case they tried to slip some submarines or minor ships in there and try to finish off what we had which they didn't do. We flew sorties all over the place looking for submarines and other ships. They picked up a few of them and blew them out of the water. We were well prepared for them this time.

Once the battle was over and you got the casualties in the sick bay how did you care for them?

The doctors took care of the most seriously wounded. We corpsmen took the other guys. We removed shrapnel, did some suturing on lacerations. We also cleaned them up from smoke and oil that had gotten on them, gave them baths, new clothes, put them in a bunk, and gave them something to eat. We were able to get them some whisky and that gave them a little boost. We just were doctors' assistants and act in the role of doctors as much as we could.

After the battle, did you go back to Pearl?

We went back into Pearl after Midway and we got patched up pretty well.

There was a lot of damage on the ship?

Yes. The chief's quarters were entirely demolished. We had the whole area blocked off with mattresses propped up with 2 x 4's hoping to keep the water out.

Where was that?

That was down in the chief's quarters about three decks down on the port side. The Japanese dropped an armor piercer through there and blew the whole side of the ship out--I would say a 10 foot by 10 foot hole. We shut off all the bilges so that the water couldn't sneak in. When we came into Pearl we were at a 30 degree list. We couldn't keep it all out.

You off loaded your patients there?

Yes. We didn't anticipate any further action like that because we knew those [Japanese] carriers were gone.

You knew right away that you won the battle?

When we got word that there were four carriers sunk, we knew that was them and the war was over as far as we were concerned.

It wasn't quite over yet.

Not quite because after Midway, 2 months later, the *Enterprise* was back in action at Guadalcanal.

Were you on the *Enterprise* when they were fixing it up?

Yes. I was on the *Enterprise* until August 1943 and I participated in all of the battles until that time.

When the ship was being repaired from its battle damage what do you remember about the ship being in the yard being repaired?

When we went in, everybody in the divisions took their jackhammers and so forth and took all of the paint off the inside of the ship because we found out that paint would catch fire. Everybody on the ship took the paint off. Then the yardmen sprayed the outside and put fresh camouflage on it and of course we had to re-stock with new vittles and stuff. The yardmen did a really good job of patching it up. Two months later we were in the Solomons looking for another fight.

And you got one.

We got one. That was the Eastern Solomons; that was after Guadalcanal. We saw Guadalcanal first.

Tell me about Guadalcanal.

We knew Guadalcanal was going to be big because the enemy was concentrating all its troops on that island and were determined to hold it. And we were just as determined that they weren't going to. We had air cover and, of course, the cruisers and battleships. It was mostly a cruiser battle. They shelled the hell out of them night and day. I don't know how anybody on that island could have lived because they sure poured it into them. Of course ,we had the planes flying off of the *Enterprise* and the new carrier *Wasp* that came out. About that time we had been building some new carriers which helped us too.

During Guadalcanal the *Enterprise* had been providing air cover for the landing?

Providing air cover, and, of course, the heavy and light cruisers were shelling it; they were pouring in the bombs under the big guns like you wouldn't believe. You could see the whole thing.

This was August 1942.

Yes. That was a 10-15 day battle and as far as I am concerned it was about as vicious a battle as we had gotten into. Once we were ashore we had to defend it. When we beat them back we unloaded a whole bunch of Marines and that was the end of Guadalcanal. Every once in awhile they would come down out of the hills and stir up a little trouble, but they never had a chance. Some of them stayed in the caves for 4 years after the war was over; they didn't even know that the war was over. They didn't even realize it but they didn't come. They were told that we would torture them and how bad the Americans were. Even on Saipan later on in the war and the women and the children and men were jumping off a high cliff to commit suicide. They didn't want to be in American hands; however, the ones we did get we put them in camps where they got food and clothing and everything and they seem to have liked it.

You were on the *Enterprise* for the Okinawa campaign. Did you have any patients to take care of?

Yes. We always had patients to take of. We had men who came down with appendicitis and various things ailments--broken legs, broken arms but no battle casualties. We didn't have any battle casualties at that time.

Where did you go after Guadalcanal?

After Guadalcanal we went down to the Eastern Solomons, the Stewart Island. That was the battle for the Eastern Solomons from 23-25 August 1942. Two months later we went to the Santa Cruz Islands. On 26 October that was another tough battle. We got pasted pretty good, hit by a couple of bombs and we had to get fixed up again. They were throwing everything they had left at us. The Battle of Santa Cruz was the last big battle I was in, although we did go back to Guadalcanal and cleaned up a few transport ships that had snuck in. We obliterated them.

At the battle of Santa Cruz where were you when the battle was going on?

I was up on my battle station on the flight deck. I was up at the same gun mounts. By that time they had fixed up that 5-inch gun mount. I was an active spotter and I'd say "Hey, look at this over here. Get this guy!" Anybody who had time to be a look-out was told "If you see anything you holler." That battle was vicious and they hit us pretty good.

When you say that they hit you pretty good what did they do?

They hit us with three bombs and just missed us with two torpedoes. One of them detonated late and it kind of wrecked the front of the ship. It would have been worse had they hit the aft end and messed up the screws. Then we couldn't have moved. However, we lucked out again, lucky old "Big E."

So you finished with the Guadalcanal and then you went down to Santa Cruz and then where did the ship go after that?

It went to the Rennell Islands. That was a small group of islands where the Japanese were trying to assemble all they could for a final push. But we knew all about it and we caught them coming in and they never got to the islands. For 2 days we took a tremendous toll of Japanese lives. They were swimming to get ashore and their transports were sunk. It was not one of the bigger battles because they didn't have anything to fight with. They were just trying to get on the island so that they could put up a defense, but it never worked.

You could see them in the water?

Yes. When the planes came in, they jumped overboard from their transports and started to swim to shore. They didn't want to get bombed on the ship; they wanted to get on solid ground if they possibly could.

Where did the ship go after Santa Cruz?

We used to go down to Espiritu Santo in the South Pacific for provisions and to fix a few holes. Then we also went down to Noumea in New Caledonia. They were our ports away from home. Rather then go way back to Pearl Harbor we had enough equipment set up at these places for minor things that could fix us up and get us going again like food and armaments.

What kind of medical supplies did you have in the sick bay?

We had everything for surgery, we could treat wounds, headaches, we could do all kind of operations and suturing. We could do just about anything a hospital could do except chase nurses. That was about it. We were just like a hospital. All the corpsmen worked with the doctors; we had a good crew. We had the guys coming in. We treated them and sent them back out there to work.

What about the hot climate?

You see, the ship didn't have air conditioning but we had vents. We would open those vents and the fans would go. It was hot but it wasn't as bad as it could have been in a still atmosphere. But those fans kind of did the trick for us and everybody was taking about two or three showers a day too, just to keep cool.

Navy showers--salt water showers.

Right, that's what it was.

How many corpsmen would you have had on the *Enterprise*?

Seventeen corpsmen, 12 medical, officers and three dental officers. They did the job well.

Do you remember what the sick bay looked like?

It was just like an emergency room at a hospital. When I went on the *Enterprise*, I forgot to tell you, that they put us different sections. First they wanted us to learn about lab work and then they sent us to the operating ward. Then they put us in the records so we could learn about that. We had about six or seven places that we were well versed in so if anybody had to fill in they would know what to do. We were well trained and we a good medical officers that taught us a lot.

Do you remember their names?

Dr. Shermer, Dr Owlsley, Dr. Hightower, Dr. Reel. Those were the doctors I knew the best and they were the old timers. The others got transferred off of the ship and we replaced them at Pearl Harbor. They had been on the ship long enough and they didn't want them to get battle fatigue. Dr. Owlsley was our senior medical officer. He was a real nice fellow and then we had a chief, Pee Wee Adair. We just had a bunch of real nice fellows; nobody pulled rank or anything. The admirals would come down with their bars off and you couldn't tell what they were. They were just everyday guys. We had a close knit crew.

One time, I had occasion to give Bull Halsey a bottle of calamine lotion for his itch. He came on the sick bay one night when it was closed but I saw who it was and thought I maybe give him what he wanted.

What do remember of your encounter with "The Bull?"

We closed the sick bay at 7 o'clock except for emergencies. I was swabbing the deck in there and I heard this knock on the door and he stuck his head in the door and he asked, "Am I too late for sick call?" I was just about to say "Yes, you are" when I took a look and saw who it was and I said "Come on in Admiral." He said, "Doc, this itch is driving me nuts. I come down 20 times and I am getting tired of calling," I got him a great big gallon jug of calamine lotion with phenol.

This was right about the time of the Midway and the Santa Cruz, you see he didn't make the Midway battle.

No, he got sent to the hospital.

This was at about the time of the Santa Cruz battle that he came down. He missed Midway and he was madder than hell. They just about had to tie him in bed.

I interviewed the corpsman who took care of him in the hospital at Pearl when he was at hospital point and this guy had to do his blood test but he was in there and he said he walked in and he was scratching his feet along the carpet because the soles of his feet were itching.

After he left there he came aboard the *Enterprise* where he was the flag officer. I saw him at the Battle of Santa Cruz, that's where he got the stuff from me. Midway came first, in June.

He was itching before then?

He was itching his whole Navy career. It wasn't always bad but the more nervous he got the worse he got.

The time you saw him was after Midway?

After Midway in June 1942 and Santa Cruz was October 1942.

And he was still itching.

Still itching. That poor man scratched himself raw but I gave him the lotion and I gave him some stuff with phenol in it and that seemed to help him quite a bit. He was standing on the bridge one day when I was walking along the flight deck and he said "How are you doing Doc?"

and the officers are standing there beside him wondering who the hell he was talking to. We had a big joke out of that.

You were his corpsman.
I sure was.

You dispensed calamine lotion more than once.
Yes. And we used to give the guys their inoculations when they were aboard the ship and checked them for gonorrhea and syphilis when they came back off liberty. It was everything a medical person would do.

Do you remember anything specific about Halsey?
He was quiet but when he said something he said it in very few words and nobody would ever doubt what he was saying. He was a brilliant tactician and when he made up his mind that he was going to do something that was it. He went against high command a couple of times, and one of them burned him but most of the time when he made an order he stuck by it; he was a stubborn old rascal.

So you saw him a whole bunch of times then?
Oh yes. He and his executive officer and the captain at that time was Sam Ginder. Of course, Halsey was a flag officer and way above them. It was just the idea that everybody worked together.

After all that you said you were in a couple other fights.
When I was transferred to Tinian one of my biggest recollections there was when the *Enola Gay* took off with the atom bomb. I was standing about 200 yards away when she took off, along with 1500 other guys. We had heard that you had better get up there to see history being made because something is going to happen around midnight tonight and it is probably going to end the war. We saw the *Enola Gay* take off and we heard the results afterwards.

What was the most memorable thing you can think of about that experience in the Pacific?
I think the biggest thing was the battle of Midway. It was the greatest naval engagement in history. We just had a memorial set up at one of the airports in Chicago commemorating the battle of Midway because Midway was named after that battle and we went down there and we were introduced and we were wined and dined and we went to see the movie "Pearl Harbor." The day was really something.

Well, it's been 56, almost 57 years, since some of that stuff has gone on. Is there anything that really stands out in your mind?
Well I think the two biggest thrills was being on that trip to Tokyo [the Doolittle Raid] and of course Pearl Harbor will always stand out in my mind. We were lucky to get out of that alive. I don't know how anybody could have gotten through that thing. We had a lot of casualties.

Going back to the Doolittle Raid, you saw those B-25s taking off?

We went along this air escort and we must have been about 1000 yards to one side of her and we were close enough to count all of those B-25s as they took off.

That's pretty interesting.

It's one of those things where you wouldn't take a million bucks for it but you wouldn't care to do it again.